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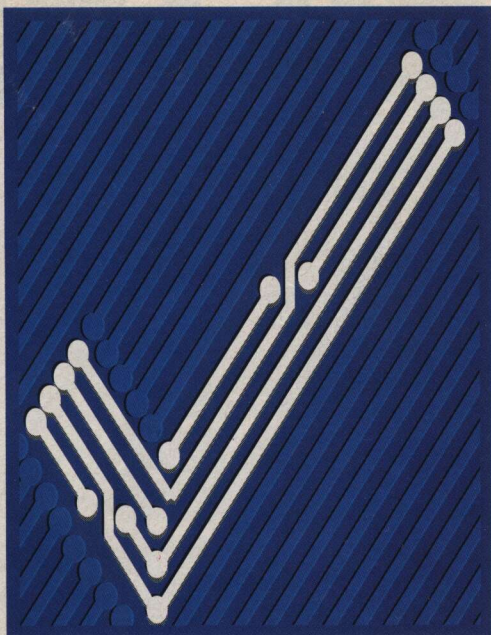


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PC PLUS PRODUCT AWARDS 1990

BEST OF 1990

PERIPHERAL OF THE YEAR WINNER - LASERJET 3

The choice of an overall winner in this category is difficult simply because of the diverse range of products that are eligible. The term peripheral covers anything from the humble mouse or hand scanner, through to colour PostScript laser printers and removable hard disks. This variety of hardware is reflected in the products that were considered by our panel of judges.

Portable PCs have been using LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) screens for some time, but now a number of such displays are available separately for desktop machines. The Sygnos 68 LCD screen (from Sygnos) demonstrates well the advantages that these units offer in terms of space and energy savings, flicker-free graphics and even reduced radiation.

The Scanplus scanner may look quite ordinary, but at less than £300 it undercuts other scanners by a large margin and comes with the excellent *Picture Publisher* greyscale editing software. The new Star LC-200 takes the best of the existing 9-pin printer technology and adds some advances of its own. We predict a bright future for this printer.

However, the winner in this section is

With Christmas and the New Year well and truly over, it's time for us to announce the PC PLUS product awards for 1990. In each of twelve categories, covering hardware and software, we've selected what we judge to have been the best product on the market during the year, and also given honourable mentions to others which have come close.

The products themselves don't have to have been released during 1990, or even to have been reviewed in PC PLUS – what counts is simply being the best. And as a final, extra category we've nominated a Product of the Year award for the one which we think has made the most significant overall contribution to the PC world.

Who won? All will be revealed over the next five pages...

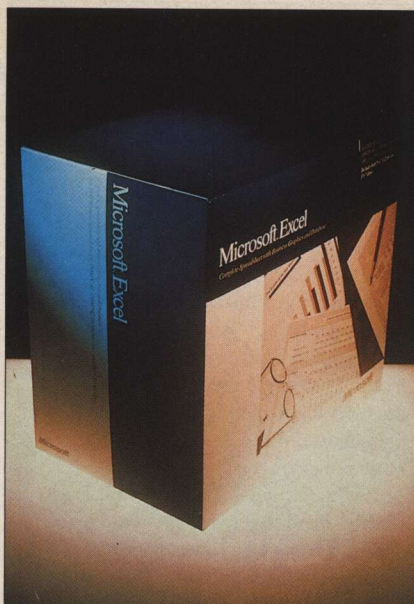
another printer – the Hewlett-Packard LaserJet III. Our judges felt that it was the peripheral that had achieved the most in 1990 by bringing high-quality laser printing to many users. Its impressive features include scalable fonts and 1 Mbyte of memory as standard as well as Resolution Enhancement Technology (RET) that smooths out jagged edges on

both text and graphics.

Sadly, there are still some areas where the judges felt matters hadn't improved in 1990, and they expressed particular disappointment at the lack of affordable 2400/2400 modems incorporating the increasingly-important MNP error checking standard.

Martin Kelly





SPREADSHEETS WINNER - EXCEL

Last year's award winner once again takes the laurels in this category. Microsoft's *Excel*, despite not being in the first flush of youth, combines powerful spreadsheeting with impressive ease of use. Details like the on-line tutorial help to make the power accessible: a notion which is even more evident in the soon-to-be seen *Excel 3*.

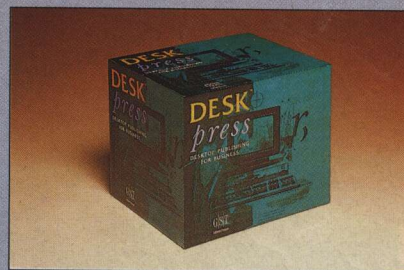
At the very top of the market, Lotus *1-2-3/G* impressed, by combining the traditional Lotus interface with OS/2's

DESKTOP PUBLISHING WINNER - DESKPRESS

DESKpress is a big product in every sense. It's among the biggest, heaviest and most disked packages to surface in the UK. The program builds on the amazing success of *Timeworks Publisher* and extends it in virtually every direction. The new product, aimed firmly at business users on a 'one-per-desk' basis, offers many features of the real heavyweights, at a fraction of the price.

Users of *Timeworks Publisher* will have no trouble in making the switch to *DESKpress*. Its intelligent use of GEM, stretching the interface to its limits with sculpted dialogues and pastel colours, makes it easy to learn from scratch, too.

As for honourable mentions, *Windows 3* has attracted plenty of attention in the DTP sphere, as the ideal vehicle for graphic-based layout packages. Xerox's *Ventura Gold for Windows* was one of the first to appear, lending support to the



standard and consolidating its position as a leader in the field. The incorporation of the Professional Extensions is very welcome, though colour separation for professional printers is still wanting.

Later in the year, *PagePlus* proved that *Windows* can attract inexpensive applications. This budget DTP has many of the attributes of the mainstream offerings such as *PageMaker* and incorporates text and graphics rotation and Pantone colour mixing. It looks set to become a major player in the budget market. **Simon Williams**

graphical Presentation Manager. However, the hardware required to run this product rules it out for most users. We'd prefer to wait for next year's true *Windows* version.

Honourable mentions include Borland's *Quattro Pro*, which manages to provide more function than *1-2-3* Release 2.2 with a more pleasant interface and still fits it all on an XT. *AsEasyAs* offers the *1-2-3* fan more for

less, and the new low price of *SuperCalc 5* should certainly win some more friends for this extremely potent package. If graphics are your prime concern, *Wingz* offers spectacular visual plasticity. There must also be a mention here for Paperback Software's *VP Planner* family. Despite highly-publicised legal difficulties this is still a very capable *1-2-3*-compatible spreadsheet. **Mike Hardaker**

PC OF THE YEAR WINNER - 386SX PCs

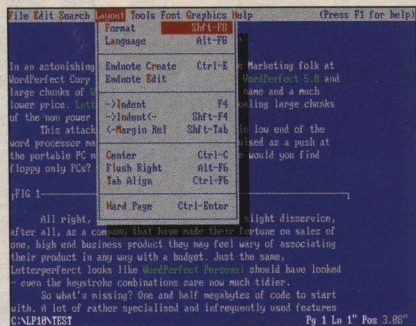
This year 80486-based PCs have become a reality and have put heavyweight computing power on the desktop. The effects of this can be seen further down the power scale, with XTs and ATs now selling at much lower prices than in the past. However, our judges felt that the most significant development in this category has been the rise to prominence of the 80386SX processor. The SX processor combines the best of two worlds - it can execute code written specifically for the powerful 80386 processor, but has a price tag nearer to that of the 80286 chip.

Rather than choose an individual manufacturer's machine, the judges have decided to award the title of PC Of The Year to the class of 80386SX-based PCs. However, that doesn't mean that there aren't specific machines worthy of an honourable mention. This year we have been impressed by the quality of workmanship and competitive pricing of SX-based PCs from both Austin and Elonex. The new Amstrad Generation 3, or PC3000 series, has seen the company at last develop a formidable range of desktop machines for business users which includes a 20MHz SX-based model.

Amstrad has also met with considerable success in the portables market with its ALT machines. Once again, an SX-based model exists and the quality of workmanship, pricing and use of reputable components make the ALT386SX an excellent product. Toshiba, the leading portables manufacturer, has also produced another successful machine in the T1000 A4-sized notebook. This machine has won many friends as a genuinely portable machine which is light enough to use in almost any location. **Martin Kelly**



COVER FEATURE

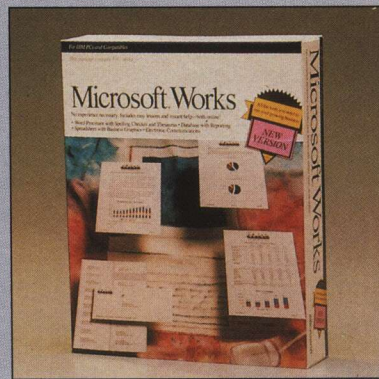


WORD PROCESSING WINNER - LETTERPERFECT

WordPerfect has been getting bigger and better as it has grown up. While this has provided outlining, table-handling and a thesaurus among other goodies, its size can prove a problem. The slimmed down *LetterPerfect* is ideal for the less exacting user or on a laptop. The comprehensive document processing of its big sibling isn't compromised, but the price is more comfortable. Combine this price with direct two-way *WordPerfect* file compatibility and you have an attractive product. This compatibility ensures a ready take up among corporate users as well as individuals.

A few other products deserve an honourable mention. There have been a number of excellent word processors released this year including *WordStar 6*. This megaweight package moves still further towards DTP with direct support of the scaleable fonts in the LaserJet III

INTEGRATED SOFTWARE WINNER - WORKS



Once again, Microsoft's *Works* has managed to hold off the opposition, and it is our integrated package of 1990.

Works scores through having an impressive range of functions which the new user can easily master right from the very start – even a reasonably

friendly communications module!

The word processing and text 'publishing' facilities of this program won us over yet again when we took a second look at it earlier in 1990.

All credit goes to Lotus, however, for attacking the same sector of the market with *LotusWorks*. Although not yet as polished as Microsoft's offering, its impressive database could make it even more appropriate for many small business needs.

Framework from Ashton-Tate and *Lotus Symphony* are still regarded as the doyens of the high-end integrated package-cum-development system. However, *Open Access III* from Software Products International is a worthy challenger in this area. Once again, it scores by having a very strong database module which can be adapted for many of the needs of the typical business.

Mike Hardaker

laser printer. *LocoScript* also made its move to the PC environment, hoping to take a lot of its Amstrad PCW users with it and evidently succeeding. While the implementation might be a little unconventional, *LocoScript*'s foreign language support is second to none.

As with most other areas of PC software, the advent of *Windows 3* has brought about some innovative word

processors. Microsoft's own *Word for Windows* proved that a graphical user interface can really be a help with text-oriented programs, and its ease of use and 'power-user' features made it a big seller. *AMI Professional* expanded the boundary between word processing and DTP still further with its extensive page layout and typographical controls.

Simon Williams

COVER FEATURE

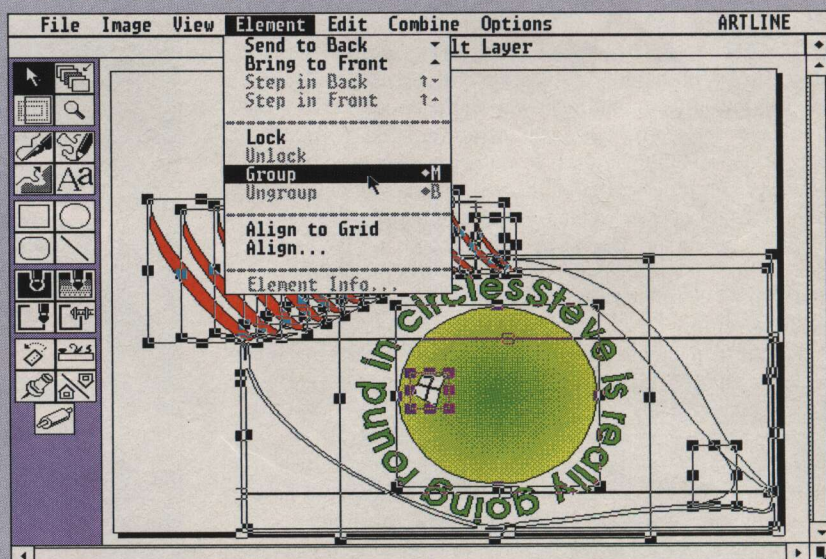
GRAPHICS WINNER - ARTLINE 2

This is the category for programs that enable the user to manipulate images on the PC screen before committing it to another medium – usually paper, though the images produced may well go to a DTP (Desk Top Publishing) package before being printed. Drawing packages, presentation packages and CAD (Computer aided Design) packages all come into this group.

CAD packages continue to grow in power, with market leader *AutoCAD* releasing version 11 this year. Among other features this added a solid object modelling option and the ability to perform Boolean operations (subtracting a prism from a cube for example).

But, inevitably, the advent of *Windows 3* galvanised graphics applications vendors in 1990, with many racing to re-release existing packages. A few, like Ashton Tate with its fast, impressive *Applause II* presentation software, chose to use its own graphical interface. However, Microsoft highlighted *Windows 3* as an application platform with *Powerpoint*, perhaps the most powerful yet intuitive presentation software we've ever seen.

On the graphic utility front *Picture*

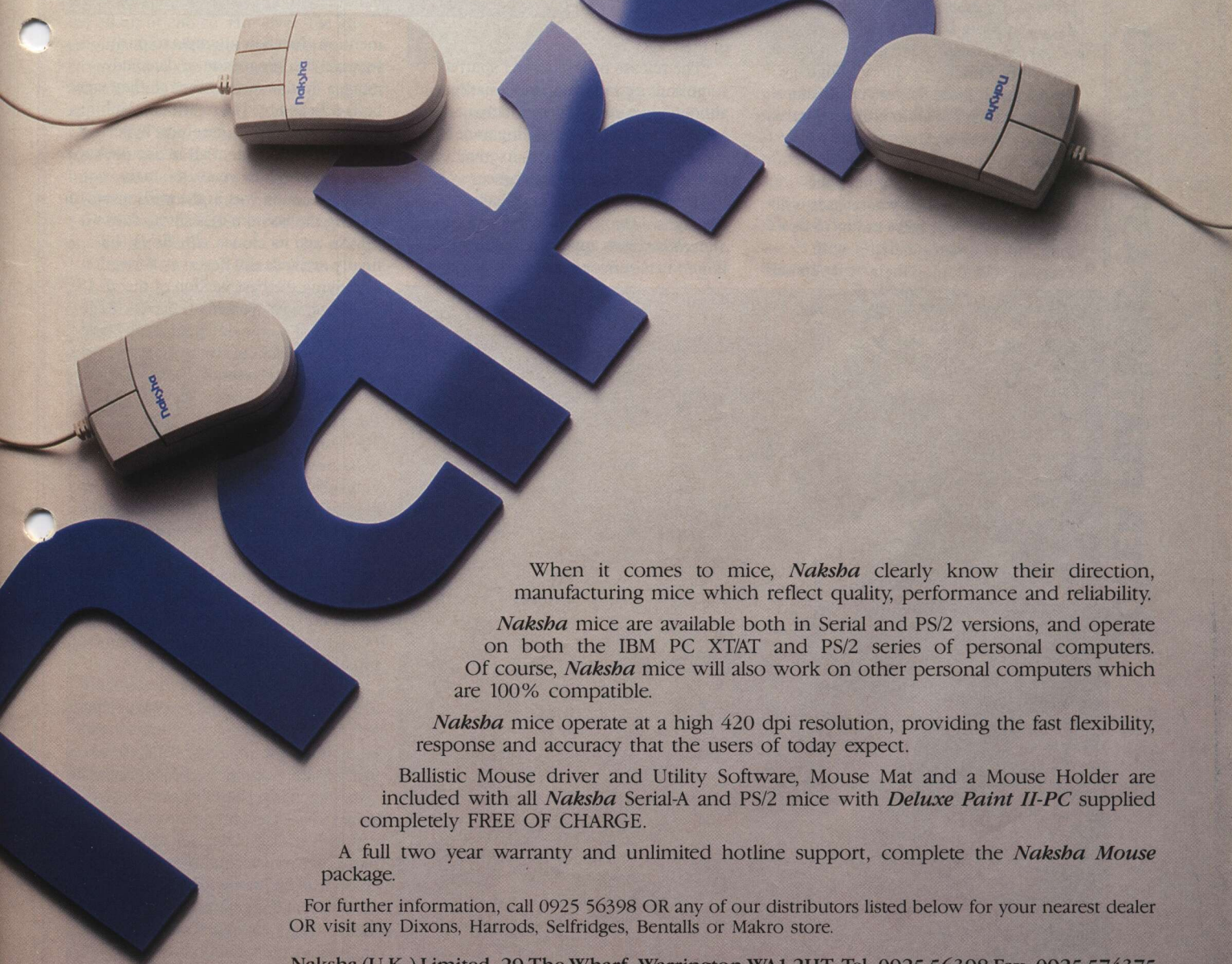


Publisher impressed us. It's an electronic retouching and editing suite for scanned mono photographs – the first 8-bit TIFF file editing software we've seen to compare with similar utilities on the Macintosh computers. A colour version is on the way.

Faster PCs and better graphic standards support better drawing packages. MicroGrafx' *Windows 3* version of *Designer* failed to overcome

its slow screen redraws. *Corel Draw* is waiting on the release of version 2. We therefore decided to award the best graphics program of 1990 to Digital Research's *Artline 2*. A complete rewrite, it addresses all the limitations of version 1. While it's easy to begin using, it will handle the most complex demands of computer based graphics designers working on the PC. Highly recommended. **Steve Patient**

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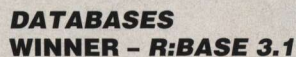
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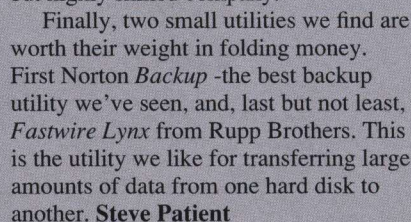
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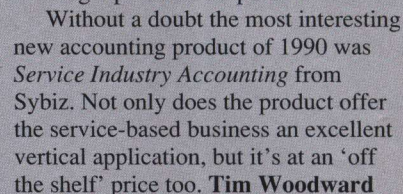
At the far end of the market, the talk was all of Structured Query Language (SQL) and 'Client Server Architecture', the idea of having an intelligent database manager at the centre of a network, performing queries on behalf of workstations and sending back the results. Some day many databases will work this way, but there seems to be a long way to go on standards, with everyone developing their own version

WINNER - WINDOWS 3

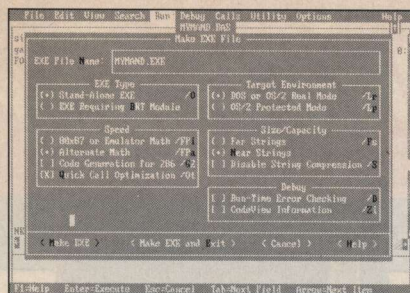
On the pure utility front *XtreePro Gold* continued the improvement of this longtime favourite hard disk manager. Lotus' *Magellan II* consolidated its position as the premier file manager with fast searches on file indexes and its huge range of file viewers.



From the Shareware end of things came an unusual package called *Page Financial Controller*, marketed initially as a *Sage Financial Controller* clone.



Paul Stephens



PROGRAMMING AND DEVELOPMENT WINNER - BASIC 7

1990 proved an exciting year for applications developers. New tools are making it faster and easier to build programs almost as quickly as the new graphical environments are making the task harder. However, we're still waiting for an application generator that doesn't require the user to do the dirty work.

The release of a new version of Underware's *Brief* editor was welcome, it helped maintain its premier position as the editor of choice. However, the all-singing, all-dancing programming environments are beginning to look very attractive for the development of smaller applications. Microsoft C version 6.0 added the *Programmers Workbench* to probably the best C compiler yet, an improved *CodeView* and the fabulous *Browser* completed the picture – if *QuickC* were included it could have been an outright winner.

Zortech C++ and Turbo Pascal

OVERALL WINNER - WINDOWS 3



There's really only one choice for overall winner – 1990 was the year of Windows/3, which gave the MS-DOS-based PC a desperately-needed breathing space in its battle against the Apple Macintosh and the ever-increasing band of UNIX-based workstations.

Windows allowed hard-pressed application developers to write programs which wouldn't be constrained by the 640K memory limit. It enabled users of 286 and 386-family PCs to make productive use of their processors extended memory and multi-tasking capabilities with the minimum of effort. Most of all it filled the gap left by the limited success of OS/2, and provided a GUI (Graphical User Interface) which was good enough and cheap enough for everyone to use.

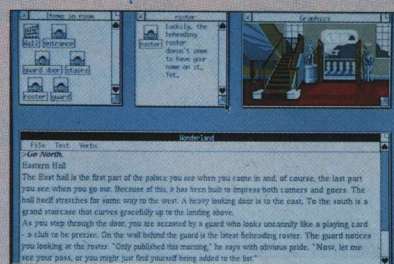
Microsoft describes *Windows* as a transition product, there to help a user on the way to full OS/2. In the future it may just be seen as the product that saved the PC's bacon at a time when it looked in danger of being left behind by its competitors.

ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMS OF THE YEAR WINNER - WONDERLAND

1990 was the year when leisure publishers finally realised that the PC can be an all-round business and pleasure computer. With innovative imports from America, increasingly polished home-grown products and some imaginative developments from across the Channel, there were many releases for sophisticated gamers.

Continuing series such as Origin's *Ultima*, Sierra's *King's Quest* and SSI's *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* role player all had new offerings. Golf simulations underwent a revival with Electronic Arts superb *PGA Tour Golf*. Meanwhile Rainbird's *Midwinter* was hot stuff in the realms of action-strategy, Delphine's Cinematique system promised great things in *Operation Stealth* and odd-ball *E-Motion* was the first New Age Game.

Our top choice is also an adventure. In a year when everybody seemed to



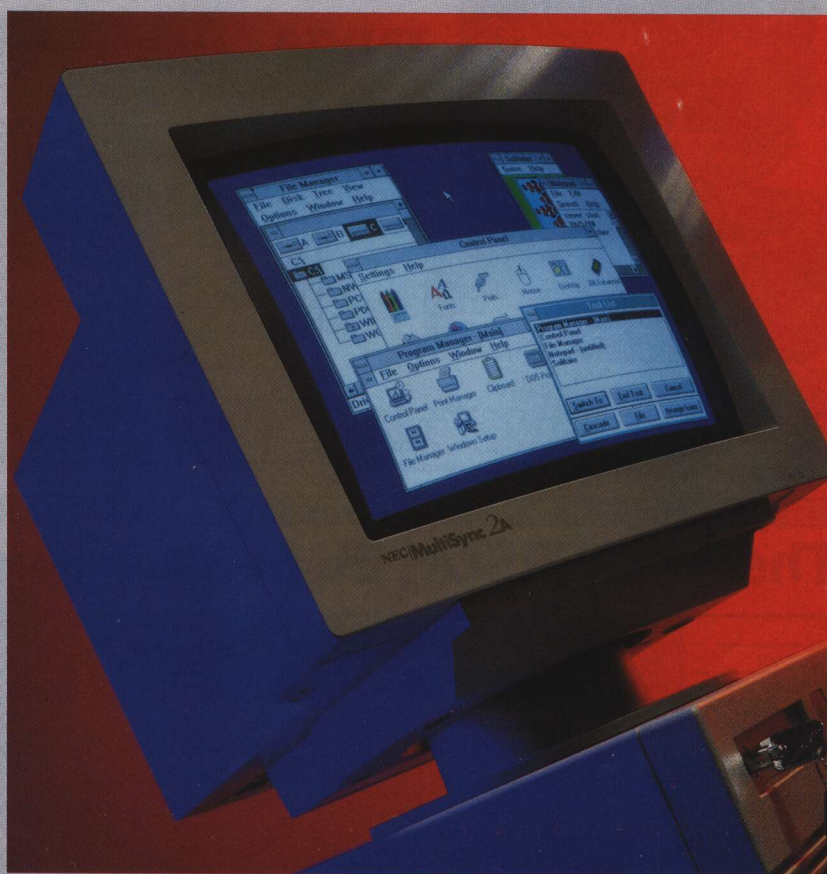
imitate Sierra's with animated, arcade-based adventures, one company re-thought the classic, text-based game and brought it out of hibernation. Magnetic Scrolls/Virgin's *Wonderland*, based on the Alice books, is exceptionally well-written with highly evocative text, gorgeous illustrations, ingenious puzzles and an elegantly original control system. Icons represent the objects you encounter, there's auto-mapping and you can move by clicking on a compass. *Wonderland* has revived adventuring by making it accessible to everyone. For a delightful challenge, follow the white rabbit! **John Minson**

brought object oriented programming to everyman. These are impressive implementations of an idea whose time must surely come.

For us the overall winner is Microsoft's *BASIC 7.0*. With this impressive programming environment, Microsoft has set a new standard in its current quest for programs that combine

user-friendliness with real power. No one using *BASIC 7.0* will ever think of *BASIC* as a beginners language again. It offers all the power you'd expect from a serious application development platform. The code it produces is just as fast and tight as most other compilers we've seen. A worthy winner.

Steve Patient



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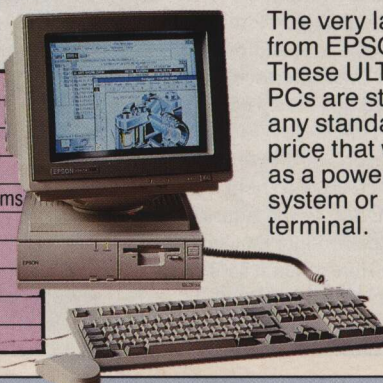
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